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SUBJECT: RUSSIA'S RODINA CONTENDS WITH KREMLIN PRESSURE AND
INTERNAL DISSENSION

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Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Political Affairs Kirk Augustine.
Reasons 1.4 (B/D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Rodina Party has embarked on a campaign to polish its image, softening (but not completely eliminating) its harsh criticism of minority migrants, while focusing on economic opportunity and social justice as the primary avenues for "transforming nationalism into patriotism." The overall goal is to unite the hodge-podge of public organizations and small parties that currently comprise the Rodina movement into an effective political opposition capable of challenging United Russia's (YR) grasp on power. The Kremlin seems to be taking no chances, however, with Rodina or its charismatic leader, Dmitriy Rogozin. Having reportedly created Rodina to drain votes away from the Communist Party during the 2003 parliamentary electoral campaign, the Kremlin now appears to be engaged in lessening Rodina's influence by engineering internal party strife and manufacturing reasons to shut out its candidates from upcoming local elections, and some commentators believe the party may be liquidated. Recent media reports suggest the possibility of Rogozin's overthrow as party leader, which could occur as early as the next party congress on March 25. However that turns out, many are skeptical that, despite Rodina's attempt to soften its image, the nationalist tiger will be able to change its stripes and expect that, however seductive the packaging, Rodina's fundamental strategy will continue to highlight societal differences and rely on heightened emotions to increase its popular appeal. END SUMMARY.

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OFFERING NEW WINE TO THE MASSES ...

[1](#)2. (C) Recent conversations with Rodina suggest that the nationalist party is reeling from Kremlin pressure but intends to press ahead with a new campaign designed to smooth some of its hard edges and broaden its popular appeal. Party leader Dmitriy Rogozin took a step toward moderating Rodina's image when he publicly condemned an anti-Semitic attack on a Moscow synagogue in January (Ref A). Mikhail Demurin, a member of the Rodina Party's political council, told us that the public could expect more such statements in the future either from Rogozin directly or through the party's public relations department. Demurin explained that the initial decision to communicate to the public more effectively had been taken during the party's 5th congress last June but had not been fully implemented until the party was banned from competing in local elections in Moscow in December. (NOTE: As reported Ref B, the Central Elections Commission took Rodina candidates off the ballot after the party aired political ads on TV that were understood as allusions to migrant workers from Central Asia as street trash. END NOTE.)

13. (C) Demurin acknowledged that the ads, which prominently featured Rogozin, were a "mistake." Although designed intentionally to create controversy, the backlash they provoked was unexpected, Demurin said, which persuaded party leaders of the need to step up efforts to improve Rodina's image. The party intends to tone down, though not entirely discard, its criticism of illegal migrants and to cast itself as a credible member of the "socialist international" coalition. The basic goal, Demurin continued, was to "transform nationalism into patriotism" and unite the loose coalition of center-left, socialist, and patriotic organizations that currently form the backbone of the Rodina movement into a genuine political opposition. (NOTE: The term "Rodina" can be confusing since it represents both the political party led by Rogozin and a broader social movement of the same name, as well as a dissident faction led by former Rogozin ally, Sergey Baburin. Demurin's comments referred principally to the Rodina Party, although he made it clear that the longer-term goal was to bring all Rodina-affiliated organizations under the party umbrella. END NOTE.)

14. (C) Much of the revamped strategy will revolve around "social justice" and economic themes, according to Demurin. Convinced that the party's future lies in increased support for Russia's nascent middle class, Demurin claimed that Rodina's membership rolls had been bolstered by owners of small businesses, military officers, bureaucrats, and members of academia, all searching for a new sense of identity in post-Soviet Russia. It was a "protest electorate" that objected to the current focus on wealth accumulation and centralization of power at the expense of average citizens. Demurin said Rodina would continue to insist that the state

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discharge its social responsibilities to citizens, including increased official investment in "human capital" and support for trade unions and worker-oriented associations, as part of a wider effort to "de-monopolize" the economy. In this context, Demurin said, the party was not intolerant of diversity and did not oppose members of non-Slavic ethnic groups, but it objected to the importation and use of foreign labor instead of recruiting and training Russian workers from poor regions of the country. He added that Rodina's message would now focus more on the economic aspects of this argument and less on the ethnic dimension.

15. (C) Rodina also proposed introduction of a fifth national priority to complement initiatives articulated by President Putin last year to develop the housing, agricultural, education, and health care sectors. Demurin referred to Rodina's proposal as the "Preservation, Development, and Growth of the Nation." He noted that Rodina did not generally oppose the basic goals of the four original priorities but predicted they would be insufficient to improve conditions for average Russians and, in any case, were designed simply as electoral ploys to win votes for YR and other Kremlin-supported candidates in next year's parliamentary elections. He maintained that Rodina's goal was longer-term; its proposal included measures for stimulating birth rates, reducing mortality, fighting poverty, and taking greater care of the destitute and homeless. It also called for legislation aimed at eliminating illegal immigration and more effective control over migrants and the nation's borders.

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... WHILE THE KREMLIN TURNS UP THE PRESSURE ...

16. (C) Turning to internal party issues, Demurin acknowledged that the situation was tense. During the February 2 political council meeting, some senior party officials had taken Rogozin to task for being too nationalistic. That had provided further impetus to tone

down the party's ethnic rhetoric. Demurin was not confident that the rift between Rogozin and former ally Baburin would ever be resolved. Referring to Baburin as a corrupt politician who had been a divisive influence within Rodina's Duma faction and had constantly challenged Rogozin's leadership, Demurin said Baburin had "sold out" to the Kremlin last June when he and a handful of supporters broke away from the main Rodina faction to form a smaller group within the legislature. Demurin characterized that action as a Kremlin maneuver to undermine the growing popularity of Rogozin and Rodina in general.

17. (C) Other forms of pressure from the Kremlin were also taking their toll, he said. Officials in several jurisdictions where local elections would be held March 12 had "bowed to Kremlin demands" to find various reasons to deny registration to Rodina Party candidates. In spite of such official pressure, however, Demurin claimed that the party was growing. Membership stood at 140,000 and was represented in 80 administrative jurisdictions throughout the country. The party had also done well in previous regional and local elections, taking a consistent average of nine percent of the vote, with an additional 5-6 percent of the electorate expressing support "in principle."

18. (SBU) Rodina Duma Deputy Mikhail Markelov, as well as recent media reports, fleshed out Demurin's remarks about the challenges facing the party. Local authorities in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug reportedly refused to register Rodina's proposed list of candidates for March 12 elections in that jurisdiction because of "incorrect information" about some of them, while the Orenburg elections commission similarly rejected Rodina's list because of alleged complaints from some members of the regional party organization that they had not participated in the selection process. Kaliningrad was the most recent location to deny registration to Rodina candidates. In Nizhniy Novgorod, Rodina candidate Andrey Klimentyev was arrested for theft, and some Rodina members are reportedly trying to exploit Rogozin's alleged links to Klimentyev to their own advantage.

Within the party, Oleg Denisov, Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee for Education and Science, reportedly has emerged as one of Rogozin's critics and might be a front-runner to take over the party leadership should Rogozin step down or be forced out. Media reports attribute the internal strife to Kremlin manipulation but also suggest that the party might soon fall apart even without outside interference. In any case, the leadership question will reportedly top the agenda at the party's upcoming congress on March 25.

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... BUT THE MESSAGE LOOKS PRETTY MUCH THE SAME

19. (C) The differences embodied in the "new" campaign that Demurin outlined might be too subtle for the average Russian to grasp and are probably more tactical than strategic. A number of our non-Rodina contacts dismissed the whole effort as "cosmetic" and believe that Rodina's basic philosophical underpinnings will not significantly change, nor will it mitigate Kremlin pressure to reduce the party's influence. At the same time, our contacts warn that Rodina's message of patriotism, strong family and cultural values, and equality of social and economic opportunities resonates positively in a Russian population still trying to find its place in the world. These observers generally note that many Rodina members applaud Putin's restoration of stability after the turmoil of the Yeltsin era, while criticizing the increasing corruption and unequal distribution of material wealth, as well as Putin's failure to prevent the further erosion of traditional values.

110. (C) Galina Kozhevnikova of Sova, a research association

that monitors nationalism and extremist trends, and Leontiy Byzov, head of the Social and Political Analysis Department of the All-Russia Public Opinion Research Center, are among those who acknowledge Rodina's popular appeal but told us that the party will continue to spark controversy and highlight societal differences as a basic strategy to recruit members. Among the more susceptible to Rodina's nationalist appeal were young people, especially in smaller cities and rural areas, where many poorly educated and underemployed youth had become alienated. Kozhevnikova, in particular, emphasized that point but noted that Rodina could not be considered an "extremist" organization since it did not espouse violence, despite a strident nationalistic message that clearly sought to marginalize ethnic minorities. She stressed that the campaign against the immigration of migrant workers from Central Asia, legal or otherwise, was a veiled effort to preserve the dominance of the country's ethnic Russian character. In Kozhevnikova's view, calling on authorities or business interests to offer jobs and training to ethnic Russian workers from the countryside (instead of importing Central Asians) was probably a non-starter from an economic perspective, but it enhanced Rodina's image among the disenfranchised.

¶11. (C) Byzov echoed Kozhevnikova to a large extent. He said Rodina's gains came mainly from the provinces, where the organization's "anti-intellectualism" plank was especially welcome. In some non-urban locations, Byzov thought Rodina's increase in support came at the expense of the Liberal Democratic Party (LPDR), despite the more widely shared view that the Communist Party (KPRF) was Rodina's chief rival. Kozhevnikova noted that while some Rodina members might be extremists, especially concerning anti-Semitic issues, the organization on the whole did not support such attitudes. However, tacit acceptance of those who did so allowed it to embrace current and prospective members looking to assign blame for their own or Russia's failings. Of the two Rodina factions in the State Duma, Kozhevnikova thought the Rogozin group was more moderate than the smaller faction led by Baburin. She described Rogozin as a polished, experienced politician who knew how to extend the limits without pushing too far. He was more a populist than a nationalist, whose charismatic propaganda skills were capable of enhancing both his personal popularity and that of Rodina. The socialist elements of the Rodina message would be particularly attractive and could broaden the party's base of supporters.

¶12. (C) Byzov characterized Rodina (mainly the Rogozin wing) as an effective organization in terms of its appeal to the population's growing interest in preserving Russian culture, language, and ethnicity. That was a message intentionally designed to divide society, in his opinion. Rodina also sought to cast itself as a party that promoted social protection and equal economic opportunity -- "recreating the Soviet Union without the communists." Many supporters turned to Rodina because of its positions on maintaining ethnic superiority and reversing the country's worsening demographic position (the latter point, in Byzov's view, was Rodina code for keeping ethnic Russians on top). Without its ethnic theme, Byzov believed that Rodina was not a very deep party, intellectually, and lacked the broader perspective needed to be perceived as a more serious political contender. He predicted that the Kremlin would continue to promote internal strife in the party and that Rodina would be wracked by scandals, manufactured or otherwise.

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WHAT IS RODINA?

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¶13. (SBU) Rodina was initially born in September 2003 when three political parties -- Rogozin's Party of Russian Regions, the Socialist United Party of Russia with Aleksandr Vatagin its nominal chairman and Sergey Glazyev as

"unofficial" leader, and the People's Will Party under the leadership of Baburin -- joined together to compete in the parliamentary elections. Most political observers agree that the Kremlin encouraged the formation of Rodina to draw votes away from the KPRF, a tactic that ultimately succeeded. Rodina won approximately nine percent of the national vote and put 40 deputies into the State Duma, where they formed their own faction. In the presidential contest in March 2004, Rodina supported Putin, but not before Glazyev's self-nomination as a presidential candidate in January of that year ignited a conflict between him and Rogozin. The two men eventually reconciled their differences to some extent, and Glazyev currently serves as one of several rotating leaders of the Rodina faction (Rogozin wing) in the Duma, while also maintaining a parallel leadership position in a left-patriotic organization called "For a Decent Life."

¶14. (SBU) A more serious dispute within Rodina's ranks broke out in early 2005 and culminated in Baburin's departure from the faction, along with a handful of deputies, and the subsequent establishment of a second, smaller Rodina faction in the State Duma. Baburin told us at the time that he broke away because of Rogozin's "egotistical" leadership style and unwillingness to share power or to consider a consolidated political platform that was not based exclusively on his own ideology.

¶15. (SBU) Rodina is both a political organization and a social movement. Its political character is represented by the Rogozin and Baburin factions in the State Duma, as well as by the individual parties (mainly Rogozin's Rodina Party, which was renamed in February 2004 from the Party of Russian Regions, and Baburin's People's Will) that comprise the two factions. But Rodina is also a broad populist movement that includes various social and patriotic organizations. Within the Rogozin wing, there is Glazyev's "For a Decent Life" and the All-Russia Rodina Association. The Baburin side includes at least one member of the Socialist United Party, as well as most, but not all, of the deputies affiliated with People's Will. In addition, Baburin maintains a close relationship with Gennadiy Semigin, leader of the Patriots of Russia coalition, who broke away from the KPRF and formed a "shadow cabinet" in March 2005 that includes Baburin as "Minister of CIS Affairs." (Glazyev is the "Minister of Finance" in the same shadow cabinet.) While these ties seem illogical at first glance, both Rodina members and communists share a common belief in statist solutions to social and economic problems. In any case, the array of loosely organized, shifting alliances offers maximum flexibility for the various individual players, serving to mask their true motivations and political loyalties.

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COMMENT

¶16. (C) Rodina, particularly the Rogozin-led faction, will likely encounter mounting pressure from the Kremlin and GOR authorities. Partly this is due to Rodina's (and Rogozin's) success in building up a significant following throughout the country that exceeded most expectations. But, having achieved its intended purpose of thwarting the communists during the 2003 elections, the Kremlin appears to calculate that Rodina is now a more potentially disruptive factor than the communists, and needs to be put under firm control or out of business. Some observers indeed believe that a Kremlin decision has already been made to liquidate the party, although that remains speculation.

¶17. (C) The extent to which the party's current internal strife is the result of Kremlin manipulation or self-destructive internal dynamics remains an open question; both media reports and our own conversations with Rodina stalwarts suggest that Rogozin's leadership style is the cause of much of the dissension, which likely would have occurred with or without Kremlin machinations.

¶18. (C) Rodina's difficulties also underscore the fragility

of Russia's political parties, most of which are personality-driven. For many observers, Rodina and Rogozin are indistinguishable, and his departure would deal a major, if not fatal, blow to the organization. In the meantime, its campaign to improve its image might be self-defeating regardless of Rogozin's political fortunes. The party staked out an assertive nationalistic position virtually from the

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beginning, and to back away now from its strong ethnic and anti-immigration policies would probably undercut its reason for existence in the eyes of many of its supporters.
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